DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 101 400 CS 500 962

AUTHOR Corley, Diana
TITLE The Introductory Course in Speech Communication in the State of Illinois.
PUB DATE Nov 74
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Illinois Speech and Theatre Association (Peoria, Illinois, November 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); *Course Content; Course Organization; *Educational Research; Higher Education; Instructional Materials; *Speech Instruction; *State Surveys; *Teaching Methods; Trend Analysis; Undergraduate Study
IDENTIFIERS Illinois

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to discover content, teaching methods, organization, and trends occurring in introductory courses in speech communication in Illinois junior colleges, colleges, and universities. One hundred and thirty-five questionnaires were mailed to the department chairperson or coordinator of fundamentals of each college in Illinois offering A.A., A.S., B.A., B.S., and B.F.A. degrees. The study concluded that a large number of colleges and universities in Illinois which offer undergraduate degrees also offer a basic course in speech communication which is required either for all students or for specific major fields; generally, the content appears to be a combination of communication theory and oral performance rather than being primarily oriented toward public speaking; the most widely used textbooks reflect the theoretical and oral performance emphasis; and the instructors are optimistic about maintaining enrollment. (RB)

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THE INTRODUCTORY COURSE IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION IN THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

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by

Diana Corley

Is the present emphasis in basic speech communication courses on communication theory or on public speaking? Is lecture giving way to games, small group, and programmed instruction? What texts are being used? The last national survey dealing with these questions was published by Gibson in 1970.[1] Speech educators in the state of Illinois, particularly at the college level, are in need of up-to-date information. This study sought to provide some of the needed information by surveying colleges and universities to discover content, teaching methods, organization, and trends occurring in the introductory course in speech communication.

Procedure

A fifty item questionnaire was constructed by the author with items being similar to those used by Gibson and based on a pilot study done by the author.[2] Items were included which would provide information that might aid departments in curriculum planning and in dealing

CS 500 968

with problems which may occur in organizing the basic course. Members of the Communication Arts Department at Black Hawk College examined the items for clarity. As is true with any written questionnaire, some problems in definition of terminology are inherent; but attempts were made to clarify the meaning of responses in each item.

A list of colleges and universities in Illinois was obtained from the College Facts Chart.[3] Those schools offering only graduate degrees or certificates only were omitted from the study. The junior and senior colleges offering A.A., A.S., B.A., B.S., and B.F.A. degrees were included since they were likely to offer a basic course. The schools included state, city community, religious and independently supported institutions.

In November of 1973, copies of the questionnaire were mailed to 135 colleges and universities. The questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey and including directions for completing the questionnaire. Surveys were sent to the department chairman or coordinator of fundamentals, if known, or to the college president or dean as listed in the College Facts Chart with instructions that the survey should be passed on to the person best qualified to

respond. A follow up letter was sent to the institutions which did not respond to the first mailing. In February of 1974, 96 responses had been obtained from ..ne schools, giving a sample of 71 per cent of the junior colleges, colleges, and universities which offer undergraduate degrees in the state of Illinois.

Results

Results were tabulated to present a view of the course in the state as a whole and to permit examination of junior college courses as compared to senior colleges or universities. Throughout the report, responses by the combined total, by junior colleges, and by senior colleges are designated by the abbreviations c, jc, and s respectively. Replies were received from 42 junior colleges and from 54 senior colleges. Of the colleges responding, 100 percent of the junior colleges offered an introductory course in speech communication while only 81 percent of the senior colleges responding offered a course. Two schools reported that they offer several courses, each of which were permitted for credit for the introductory speech course. The schools responded to the survey on the basis of their speech communication course.

Organization In the state as a whole and at the junior

college level, the course is most frequently required only by major fields which specify speech as a requirement (c=42%, jc=60%). The course is required for "all students" at only 32 per cent of the combined colleges and at only 24 per cent of the junior colleges. At the senior level, the opposite response occurred: 41 per cent required the course of all students while only 23 per cent required the course for spesific majors. Some schools offer the course as an elective only. Few require it of majors and minors in speech only.

Over half of the total schools provide a method by which the student may be exempted from the course (c=57%). More senior colleges (72%) than junior colleges (43%) permit exemption. Most frequently exemption is obtained by a combination of oral and written examinations (c=48%, jc=56%, s=43%). Some give credit for substituting another course (c=17%, jc=11%, s=25%). Few give credit for practical experience, military training, or work experience (c=4%, jc=5%, s=4%).

There is a tendency to keep class sizes small at both junior and four year level. No junior college indicated a class size of over 30 students. Responses concerning class size were about equally divided between classes of 21-30 students (c=47%, jc=55%, s=38%) and

classes of 11-20 (c=42%, jc=38%, s=46%). Only two senior colleges had classes of 30-100 students, while only one school responded to "over 100 in a combination of mass lecture and small groups."

The number of sections offered each term not including summer, at the junior college level was most frequently 1-5 (38%) followed by 10-20 sections (31%). The senior colleges most frequently offered 1-5 sections (56%) then 5-10 sections (18%). Under both semester and quarter systems, more schools offer the course in the summer than do not.

The course is usually offered for either 3 semester hours credit or 4 quarter hours. A few schools offer the course for 4 semester hours credit (n=9) or 5 quarter hours credit (n=4). Six schools offer the course for 2 semester hours credit, while three schools offered it for 3 quarter hours.

The basic course is primarily a Freshman level course (c=85%, jc=93%, s=77%), although some schools classify it as sophomore level (c=14%, jc=5%, s=23%). As might be expected, none classify it as junior or senior level.

Personnel The responsibility of directing the basic course is about equally divided in the state between the department chairman (c=44%, jc=38%, s=51%) and an appoint-

ed coordinator (c=46%, jc=48%, s=44%). The director of the basic course is usually an instructor (c=36%, jc=59%, s=31%) or an associate professor (c=22%, jc=12%, s=31%). At the junior college, some schools rank all faculty as instructors. This may be a factor in the number who responded to "instructor" on this item.

The course is most frequently taught by all ranks of faculty members not including graduate students at the senior level (77%). All ranks plus graduate students teach at 13 per cent of the responding institutions. At the junior college, the course is most frequently taught by instructors only (50%) than by all ranks (38%). Again, the junior college response is no doubt affected by the practice of designating all facutly as instructors only.

Most schools require a minimum of a Master's degree to teach the course (c=86%, jc=86%, s=86%), but some permit the Bachelor's as a minimum degree (c=11%, jc=12%, s=10%). One two year school permitted teaching with less than a Bachelor's degree.

Content Most of the schools indicated that their course emphasis is a combination of theory and performance. "Public speaking emphasis" was the next most frequent response. (See Table 1.) Responses to this item were consistent with responses concerning the units taught in

the course. Communication theory, persuasive speaking and informative speaking were ranked very high and very closely. (See Table 2.) This is a change in response compared to Gibson's[4] national results found in 1970 when public speaking was more dominant.

Lecture still leads as the most popular teaching method, but it is closely followed by discussion groups. It is probably more accurate to conclude that most people use a combination of lecture and discussion. The increase in interpersonal approaches and communication theory has probably led to more widespread use of games. Comparitively speaking, there is little team teaching or programmed instruction. (See Table 3.)

Only a small percentage from either level responded that they do not give exams (c=11%, jc=12%, s=10%). Of those who do give exams, more of the senior colleges give written exams (62%) than oral, not including regular oral performance (18%). At the junior college level, the responses were equally divided between oral exams not including regular oral performance (46%) and written (46%).

Responses concerning the texts in use were difficult to tabulate. Not all of the respondants indicated the text being used, while some replied simply "several texts." Several schools are not using a text. Thirty-six differ-

ent texts were designated. Twenty-five of those were mentioned only once. For purposes of this report, the texts mentioned more than once are listed in Table 4. The list is dominated by those titles which are communications or combination approaches rather than public speaking emphasis. However, Monroe and Ehninger, which still has a strong public speaking emphasis, still ties with Brooks for most widely used text.

Trends Most of those responding indicated that they do not foresee any significant changes in course content (c=74%, jc=76%, s=72%). Most have a combination approach and apparently most plan to keep it at the present time. The next most frequent response to changes in content statewide and for junior colleges was "less performance, more theory and group work" (c=16%, jc=21%) while the second highest response by senior colleges was "more performance, less theory" (15%).

Most schools feel that enrollment will either remain the same (c=63%, jc=43%, s=78%) or will increase (c=32%, jc=43%, s=21%). This response suggests that schools do not anticipate major changes in curriculum which might eleminate speech as a required course.

If enrollment increases, the major problem resulting would be staff assignments (c=51%, jc=50%, s=51%).

No other response, including administrative support, loss of community support, or financial problems was close. Staff assignments would also be the major problem resulting from a decrease in enrollment (c=52%, jc=60%, s=44%). Finances was the next most serious problem (c=16%, jc=17%, s=18%). In the event of decrease in enrollment, the departments would usually reassign staff (c=59%, jc=60%, s=59%) rather than retrain staff, reduce personnel or reduce teaching loads. The second highest response was "reduce personnel" (jc=21%, s=18%).

Conclusions

A high percentage of colleges and universities in the state which offer undergraduate degrees also offer a basic course in speech communication which is required either for all students or for specific major fields. Generally, the content presently appears to be a combination of communication theory and oral performance rather than primarily public speaking emphasis. The most popular texts and units taught reflect this emphasis. Most instructors appear to be optimistic about maintaining enrollment. There did not appear to be vast differences between junior and senior colleges in responses to most items. Most schools indicated that the

basic course in speech communication at the college level in Illinois will not undergo significant changes in content or enrollment, although some schools may change methods or approaches to content.

TABLE 1

Course Emphasis

Emphasis	Combined %	Jr. %	Sr. %
Public speaking	22	17	28
Communication processes	17	14	21
Combination of theory and oral performance	58	64	51
Group communication	1	2	

TABLE 2

Units taught in the course

TOPIC	C(N=81) %	Jr.(N=42) %	Sr.(N=39) %
Communication processes	89	95	82
Informative speech	89	95	82
Persuasive speech	91	93	90
Reasoning	77	88	64
Listening	73	86	60
Nonverbal communication	75	83	67
Interpersonal communication	74	81	67
Outlining	69	81	56
Demonstration or visual aid speech	67	71	62
Group Discussion	58	62	54
Impromptu speech	54	62	46
Ethics	51	60	41
Voice	51	60	41
Semantics	43	55	31
Mass Communication	31	45	15
Rhetorical Criticism	33	45	21
Speech to entertain	37	43	31
Oral Interpretation	33	38	28
Interracial Communication	24	26	21
History of Rhetoric and Public Address	16	17	15
Debate	10	14	5
Drama	7	10	5
Business and Organizational	2	2	3

TABLE 3

Teaching Methods Used

Method	Combined %	Jr. %	Sr. %
Lecture	93	95	90
Discussion Groups	83	88	77
Video Tapes	53	67	38
Games	47	60	33
Team Teaching	14	17	13
Programmed Instruction	16	14	18

TABLE 4

Texts In Use In The State

Text	Combined (Total number of responses)	Jr.	Sr.
Brooks, Speech Communication	8	6	2
Monroe and Ehninger	8	5	3
Samovar and Mills, Oral Communication: Message and Response	5	3	2
Ross, Speech Communication	4	4	0
Giffin and Patton, Fundamentals of Interpersonal Communication	3	1	2
Wenburg and Wilmot, The Personal Process of Communication	3	1	2
Bormann and Bormann, Speech Communication	3	1	2
Jeffrey and Peterson, Speech A Text with Adapted Readings	3	2	1
Anderson, Introduction to Communication Theory and Practice	2	2	0
Wilson and Arnold, Public Speaking As A Liberal Art	2	0	2
Bryant and Wallace, Fundamentals of Public Speaking	2	0	2
Others--Mentioned only once each			
Communication titles	12	6	6
Speech or public speaking titles	13	5	8
no response	11	4	7
"various texts"	3	2	1
no text	8	7	1

FOOTNOTES

[1]James W. Gibson, Charles R. Gruner, William D. Brooks, and Charles R. Petrie, Jr., "The First Course in Speech: A Survey of U.S. Colleges and Universities," Speech Teacher, XIX (January, 1970) pp 13-20.

[2]Diana Corley, "A Survey of the Basic Speech Course as Taught at Selected Colleges and Universities," (Unpublished research. Black Hawk College, 1973.)

[3]College Facts Chart 1971-72, (Spartanburg, South Carolina, National Beta Club 1972) pp 13-20.

[4]Gibson, p. 19.

Assistant Professor
Communication Arts Department
Black Hawk College

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[1]James W. Gibson, Charles R. Gruner, William D. Brooks, and Charles R. Petrie, Jr., "The First Course in Speech: A Survey of U.S. Colleges and Universities," Speech Teacher, XIX (January, 1970) pp 13-20.

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